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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 003169

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SUBJECT: VFM ZHANG YESUI TAKES U.S. AFFAIRS ROLE, WILL
ATTEND STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DIALOGUE

REF: BEIJING 2814

Classified By: Political External Unit Chief Edgard Kagan. Reasons 1.4
(b/d).

Summary

11. (C) Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui has been made the VFM-level supervisor of the North American and Oceanian Affairs Department, though MFA contacts say that Assistant Foreign Minister He Yafei will continue to supervise the Department on a day-to-day basis. Zhang, not Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, will represent the MFA at the upcoming Strategic Economic Dialogue meetings in Washington May 22-23.

Zhang's background is largely on European issues, though he previously served at the PRC Mission in New York, in the IO Department and as Director General for Protocol. End Summary.

12. (C) The Embassy was informed on short notice May 11 that VFM Zhang Yesui would meet with PACOM Commander Admiral Keating later that day, a change from the earlier scheduled meeting with AFM He Yafei. VFM Zhang was also listed as the MFA representative on the participation list for the Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED) provided to visiting Treasury Department officials late on May 10. When queried about the change, MFA North American and Oceanian Affairs officials stated that VFM Zhang has assumed responsibility at the Vice Foreign Minister level for American Affairs, a portfolio earlier supervised by now-Minister Yang Jiechi. Nevertheless, U.S. desk officers stressed that AFM He Yafei remains in day-to-day charge of U.S. affairs and remained their "big boss." North America Department Deputy Director General Xie Feng reiterated this line with Polmincouns, noting that VFM Zhang "would play some role" on U.S. affairs, but that AFM He Yafei would continue to supervise the North American and Oceanian Affairs Department on a day-to-day basis.

Rules Require Vice Ministerial Supervisor

13. (C) U.S. Affairs Director Wang Baodong explained that according to MFA regulations, every Department must be supervised by a Vice Minister. Due to the limited number of Vice Minister positions (which are set by central personnel authorities and the State Council), the MFA has a number of Assistant Foreign Ministers who handle day-to-day supervision of MFA Departments. However, these Assistant Ministers formally report to Vice Ministers, so as to live up to the

regulations requiring all Departments to be supervised a Vice Minister. Wang commented that Assistant Minister He Yafei had previously reported to then-VFM Yang Jiechi. Thus, VFM Zhang Yesui is replacing Yang Jiechi as the Vice Minister-level official supervising AFM He, according to Wang. MFA IO Department UN Division Director Yang Tao said that Zhang's appointment was "a formality," adding that Chinese protocol requires Vice Minister-level rank for certain functions, particularly to attend meetings that involve high-ranking visitors or senior Chinese officials.

Comment

14. (C) We are not sure how much significance to attach to Zhang's new role on U.S. affairs. Several sources have posited that Zhang has been tipped as China's new Ambassador to the UN in New York (see reftel). If so, then supervising U.S. affairs would certainly be seen as a feather in Zhang's cap. Zhang's lack of background in U.S. affairs, however, is a striking departure from previous Vice Ministers who have been responsible for the issue. End Comment.

Bio Note

15. (C) Bio Note: An experienced Europe expert who has spent most of his career working on Western European issues, Zhang had given up day-to-day supervision of the European Department in 2006, when AFM Kong Quan took over management of the portfolio. Zhang also served at the PRC Mission in New York (1988-1992), in the MFA IO Department (1992-1996) and as Director General of the Protocol Department from

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1996-2000. Appointed Assistant Foreign Minister in 2000 and then Vice Minister in 2003, from 2003-2006 Zhang was also responsible for day-to-day supervision of the Arms Control and Disarmament Department, though he appeared somewhat disengaged in nonproliferation and arms control discussions. Our contacts at European Embassies say that Zhang was a straightforward and open, though not always results-oriented interlocutor. Zhang's wife, Chen Naiqing, was recently appointed Ambassador for Korean Peninsula Affairs, effectively VFM Wu Dawei's deputy Head of Delegation for the Six-Party Talks, after having served as PRC Ambassador to Norway. Both Zhang and Chen attended the London School of Economics in 1975-1976, where they reportedly overlapped briefly with Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi.
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